

Belgian position and recommendations on SSH integration and role in the future Framework Programme for Research and Innovation

This document provides the Belgian position and recommendations with respect to the integration of social sciences and humanities (SSH) in the future Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP), based on the lessons learned from the current integration of SSH in Horizon 2020 (H2020).

1. INTRODUCTION

The current challenges that the European Union is facing are multifaceted. Firstly sociocultural issues such as “post-truth era”, lack of trust in the institutions, uberization of economy or access to European heritage challenge the research expertise of a broad diversity of social scientists and scholars in the arts and the humanities. Secondly, as the FET advisory group recently emphasised: “Science and technology enabled shifts will redraw not only our economy, culture and society, but also our biology and our ethics. This is thus of uttermost importance to incorporate a social sciences and humanities research component in the development of these new technologies.”¹ Finally, social sciences contribute significantly to industrial innovation².

European answers to these societal and technological challenges must be holistic and take into account or even, in some cases, focus on the economic, political, social, psychological, communicational, legislative and cultural dimensions of the problems at stake. Hence research dedicated to the understanding of – and research aiming at providing solutions that relate to – these diverse dimensions of human behaviour has to be interdisciplinary at heart. It should involve whenever relevant expertise from the different disciplines of the social sciences, the STEM, the humanities, and, last but not least, arts, whose creative and artistic input can provide significant added value. Furthermore, whenever needed, the formulation of the research question and the research design have to be driven by social sciences, arts

¹ FET Advisory Group, *The need to integrate the Social Sciences and Humanities with Science and Engineering in Horizon 2020 and beyond*, December 2016

² OECD, *What role for social sciences in innovation? Re-assessing how scientific disciplines contribute to different industries*, 20 September 2017

and humanities (SSAH) approaches and methodologies, whether qualitative or quantitative in nature, including the recent developments in big data social sciences.

In this perspective, the notion of “disciplinary integration” in FP should not refer exclusively to the integration of the different disciplines of the SSAH to projects that have been thought under STEM and technology oriented frames, but to the early adoption of an interdisciplinary approach, from the formulation of the societal and/or technological challenge to tackle itself.

2. CURRENT SITUATION OF SSH INTEGRATION IN HORIZON 2020

Belgium considers that the principle of SSH embedment - or better: the notion of interdisciplinary collaboration – throughout Horizon 2020 constitutes an important and positive step towards the recognition of the contribution of SSH expertise in the resolution of the societal challenges of our times. In many cases, researchers from diverse backgrounds responded positively to the related calls and innovative interdisciplinary consortia have been put in place, which would never have existed otherwise. Nevertheless, a deeper look at the second intermediary report published by the Commission on SSH integration in H2020 (call 2015)³ shows that the integration may still become more efficient and engage a broader diversity of disciplinary expertise.

2.1. With regard to the **effectiveness of the integration of SSH** into interdisciplinary consortia, there is a huge disparity between the different pillars and challenges of the programme, with the SC6 (H2020 6th Societal Challenge “Europe in a changing world”) being a high point (23 flagged topics on 28), and the LEIT-Space a particularly low point (no flagged topics), although the latter included topics that may have benefitted from an SSAH perspective (e.g. scientific instrumentation, space robotics technologies, earth observation).

It should be noted that even in the SC6, during the period 2014-2015, compared to the total budget of EUR 310 million for the entire Societal Challenge, only 41% of the budget has been devoted to socio-economic research topics⁴. Also the SC6 is the societal challenge with the lowest success rate within Horizon 2020⁵, which may discourage the best SSAH researchers to apply.

84% of the projects funded under SSH-flagged topics (i.e. 83 out of 256) in the call 2015 of H2020 included a SSH partner, and the global proportion of SSH partners in selected projects was 27%. Taking an integration threshold of 10%, the SSH integration is considered as “good” by the Commission for 57% of the projects. But if we raise the integration threshold to 20% (rather than 10%), we find out that only 39% of the projects funded under

³ EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2017, *Integration of social sciences and humanities in Horizon 2020: participants, budgets and disciplines - 2nd monitoring report on SSH-flagged projects funded in 2015 under the societal challenges and Industrial Leadership priorities*, <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/acac40f5-e84b-11e6-ad7c-01aa75ed71a1>, consulted on 1 August 2017.

⁴ EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2017, *Issue papers for the High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU research and innovation programmes*, https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/hlg_issue_papers.pdf.

⁵ EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2017, *Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020. Commission Staff Working Document*, https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/book_interim_evaluation_horizon_2020.pdf#view=fit&page=ode=none, consulted on 26 October 2017.

SSH-flagged topics are to be considered as successful in the integration of the SSH. And if we exclude the Societal Challenge 6 from the analysis – in which the SSH research concentrates -, only 31% of the projects are to be deemed as successful.

On a more qualitative level, it has to be noted too that up to 9% of the SSH partners do not do any research at all but are in charge of issues linked to impact evaluation, dissemination and financial sustainability, being kind of “add-on” to the project.

2.2. With regard to the **diversity of SSH disciplines involved** in 2015, SSH integration has been mainly focused on some specific disciplines, such as economics (26%) and administrative and political sciences (17%). The expertise of other disciplines such as anthropology, communication or education is not well integrated in the European approach. In more general terms humanities and arts are only considered in SC6 and are virtually absent of the rest of the programme.

3. BELGIAN POSITION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE INTEGRATION AND ROLE OF SSAH IN THE FUTURE FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

Considering the aforementioned observations, Belgian position and subsequent recommendations are based on the three following cornerstones: the need of a more ambitious interdisciplinary approach to SSAH integration (including the A in SSH), the integration of a broader scope of disciplines in a “quadruple helix” perspective and the involvement of SSAH experts at all stages of the development, implementation and monitoring of the framework programme.

3.1. The interdisciplinary approach to societal challenges has to become more ambitious.

Current efforts should be amplified in the next FP to integrate non-technological, cultural, social, institutional, organisational and behavioural innovation, including innovative business models and also service innovation and user- and demand- driven approaches as well as financing of the go-to-the market phase. This implies where relevant the funding of SSAH driven topics in which the emphasis will explicitly be on the non-technological dimensions of the societal challenge to tackle. SSAH added value should also be better taken into consideration with regard to future FP industrial and technological sub-programmes.

Therefore Belgium makes the following recommendations:

1. Within the next FP, a societal challenge or “mission” should focus on the social and cultural challenges that Europe is currently facing, in the wake of what is currently done with the societal challenge 6 of Horizon 2020. This does not mean though putting the emphasis on any disciplinary approach towards its resolution, but focusing on the non-technological dimensions of the considered challenge or “mission”.
2. SSAH rather than SSH should be the point of departure of the current integration exercise: indeed the cultural and creative industries have an important role to play throughout the innovation process, from the early conceptualisation on to prototyping.
3. In each call of the next FP, a dedicated number of topics should be conceived as SSAH driven and not only as integrating SSAH. In those SSAH-driven topics, the social, cultural, economic and/or political dimensions - and not the technological one - of the societal challenge should be deemed as critical to tackle the problematic.

4. In this perspective, the SSAH flagging should not be an ex post process but a guiding principle. From the very conceptualization of the topics, it should be decided which topics have to require SSAH participation and hence be SSAH flagged.
5. Hence the SSAH flagging should not be only an online tool (on the participant portal) but explicitly appear in the work programmes.
6. In complement to the current flagging system, the online tool should enable applicants to identify easily the topics in which their expertise could be useful. Therefore, for each topic, key words should be provided and be used as search functions for applicants.
7. Propositions relating to a SSAH flagged topic which do not integrate SSAH elements in their activities have to be considered as out of scope by the evaluators.
8. Commission should ensure that guidelines relating to SSAH integration are well communicated to expert evaluators and duly followed by them, warranting the coherence of interdisciplinary assessment of the proposals through the different subparts of the FP, and explicitly mentioning that SSAH flagged topics require the participation of SSAH.
9. More expert evaluators with an experience in assessing interdisciplinary projects should be recruited and involved in evaluation. Relevant expertise in interdisciplinary projects should be mentioned in the database of expert evaluators that is kept updated by the Commission.
10. To insure the coherence of SSAH integration throughout the FP, SSAH experts from the Commission should systematically participate in each and every configuration of the Programme Committee.
11. In the monitoring of the FP, the difference should be made explicit between substantial participation of SSAH actors, and other “SSAH partners” who are in charge of more peripheral tasks.
12. Outstanding projects featuring productive collaborations between social scientists, humanities scholars, other researchers and/or technologists should be given more emphasis and publicity, in outlets such as the Horizon Magazine and/or via a dedicated page on the Horizon 2020 Website. Ideally interviews with partners and coordinators of such projects may be conducted and published, which emphasise good practices and positive outcomes of SSAH integration and SSAH driven research.

3.2. In the perspective of the “quadruple helix”, a **broader diversity of disciplines within the SSAH** - not forgetting the “H” of humanities and the “A” of arts - should be considered as providing a valuable contribution to the next FP and, more particularly, to its more complex societal challenges and “missions”.

Therefore Belgium makes the following recommendations:

1. In a RRI perspective, the drafting of topics which integrate non-technological, cultural, social, institutional, organisational and behavioural innovation should be in part based on a meaningful, innovatively and democratically conducted consultation of citizens, and take into account their perceptions and experiences of the challenge to be tackled.
2. To insure the coherence and efficiency of a responsible and horizontal integration of SSAH in the FP, a SSAH platform, consisting of researchers and representatives from policy, business and civil society, might provide input for SSAH activities and social innovation in future FPs, analogous to the already existing European Technology Platforms. Such a platform should be SSAH driven but at the same time include

stakeholders from outside the SSAH research community, in the perspective of fostering an interdisciplinary context that better takes into account the specificities and added value of SSAH research for the FP and EU research and innovation ecosystems.

3. Diverse SSAH disciplines should be further involved in the development of a « science of science » and a « science of open science ». Social studies of science and technology but also arts and humanities may contribute to the study of key concepts for the ERA such as impact, openness, responsibility in research and innovation, science co-design or science diplomacy, and provide a rich empirical and theoretical contribution to the European policy making in research and innovation.

3.3. This integration of a broader diversity of SSAH disciplines requires in turn the **effective and horizontal involvement of SSAH researchers with a diversity of disciplinary backgrounds** in the very process of defining the societal challenges or “missions”, collaborating together with other experts to build the general framing for the research questions that will be asked through the different calls, and in relation to which the propositions will be evaluated.

Therefore Belgium makes the following recommendations:

1. SSAH researchers should be further included in the advisory groups of all pillars of the next FP, in the drafting of the scoping documents and work programmes, as well as in the design of the topics and possible focus areas.
2. Finally, the diversity of disciplinary backgrounds of the experts engaged in the evaluation of the proposals should reflect as much as possible the interdisciplinary nature of the topics including where relevant expertise in art and humanities.

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